

V. ACHIEVING THE VISION

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

A. INTRODUCTION

The community has expressed a desire to utilize the Plan of Conservation and Development as an instrument of municipal government to preserve and enhance desired aspects of Newtown's community character. This section of the Plan focuses on defining Newtown's community character, followed by an examination of opportunities to preserve and enhance desired community character elements, even as Newtown continues to grow. A full discussion of the need to incorporate Community Character consideration in updating Newtown's POCD is provided in Plan Memorandum #1, Community Character.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CHARACTER?

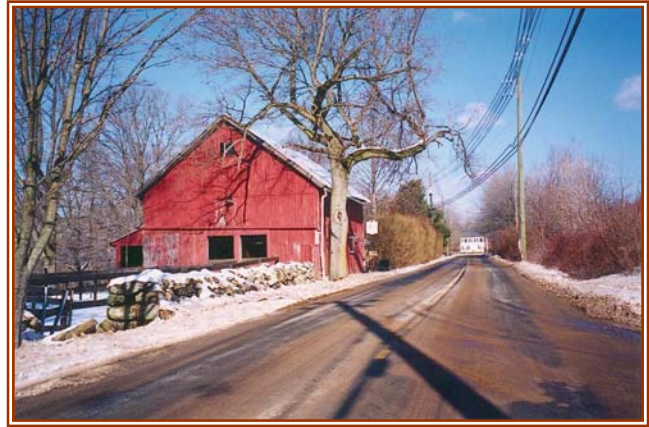
"IT'S A LITTLE HARD TO DEFINE, BUT I KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT."

B. DEFINING NEWTOWN'S COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community character is the essence of

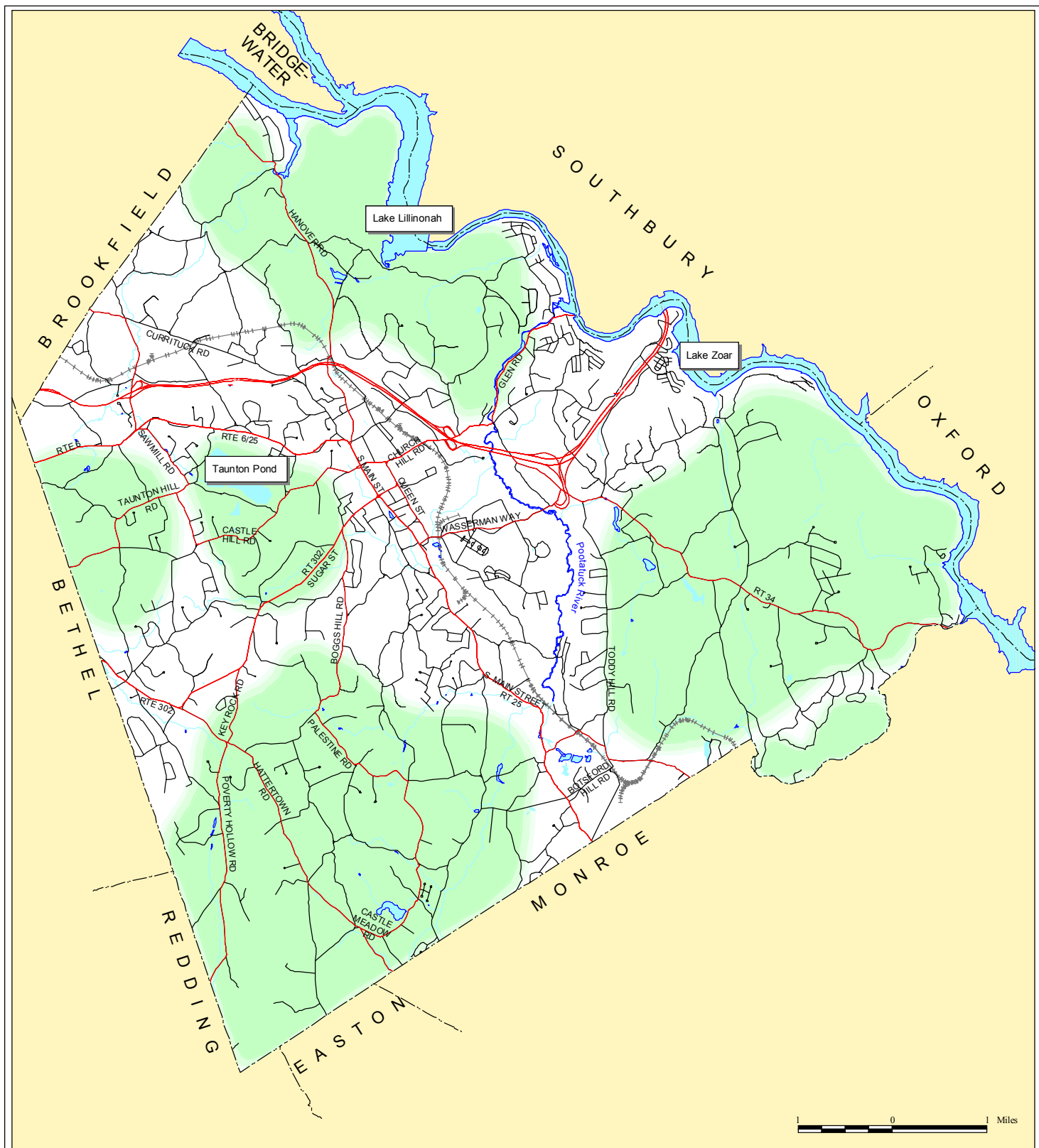
a town. The character of Newtown is shaped by its physical attributes and by the sense of community arising from the many activities which take place within its boundaries.

- **Pastoral and Rural Landscape:** The visual character of Newtown is derived from the perception of both its natural landscape and the built environment. Newtown's visual character is shaped in part by its "green" and pastoral landscapes. The remaining vestiges of Newtown's past agricultural character, combined with its rolling terrain, and large forested areas, generates a sense of openness that still dominates the visual character of significant areas of the Town. Areas of Newtown possessing strong pastoral and rural characteristics are indicated on the Map of Pastoral and Rural Landscapes.
- **Natural Features:** Newtown's terrain is largely rolling, punctuated by steep hills and deep valleys, rock outcroppings, flood plains and wetlands. Newtown contains several significant natural and manmade water features including: Lakes Zoar and Lillinonah on the Housatonic River; the Pootatuck River, which flows northward across Newtown, emptying into the Housatonic River; Taunton Pond, a beautiful upland water body; Pond Brook; Deep Brook; Limekiln Brook; the Upper Aspetuck River; and the Halfway River, on Newtown's southeastern boundary with Monroe.
- **Newtown's Image Corridors:** Some of Newtown's well traveled roadways possess particularly picturesque views of the Town's "countryside." These areas have been identified as Image Corridors, where the views from the roadways establish lasting images



Great Ring Road

of the town's natural beauty and contribute to the formation of Newtown's community character. Identified Image Corridors are highlighted on the Map of Image Corridors.



SOURCE OF BASE MAP:

Road Network -
Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, 2000

Legend

General Areas of Pastoral & Rural Landscapes

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Figure 2 Pastoral & Rural Landscapes

Plan of Conservation & Development

Newtown, Connecticut



HARRALL-MICHALOWSKI
ASSOCIATES, Incorporated

Hamden, Connecticut

January 2002

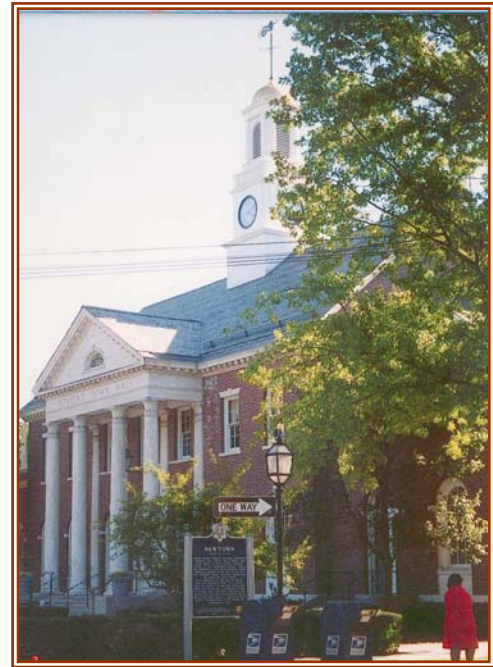


- **Open Space:** Publicly owned open space and land protected by non-profit land trust

organizations directly contribute to the visual perception of Newtown's rural and pastoral qualities. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection controls approximately 2,800 acres of State forests and parklands in Newtown and private conservation organizations in Newtown collectively control over 800 acres of open space. Many of these private open space holdings have very prominent locations and make powerful contributions to the collective perception of the visual character of Newtown. Together, these several thousand acres of open space continually define Newtown's "green" image.

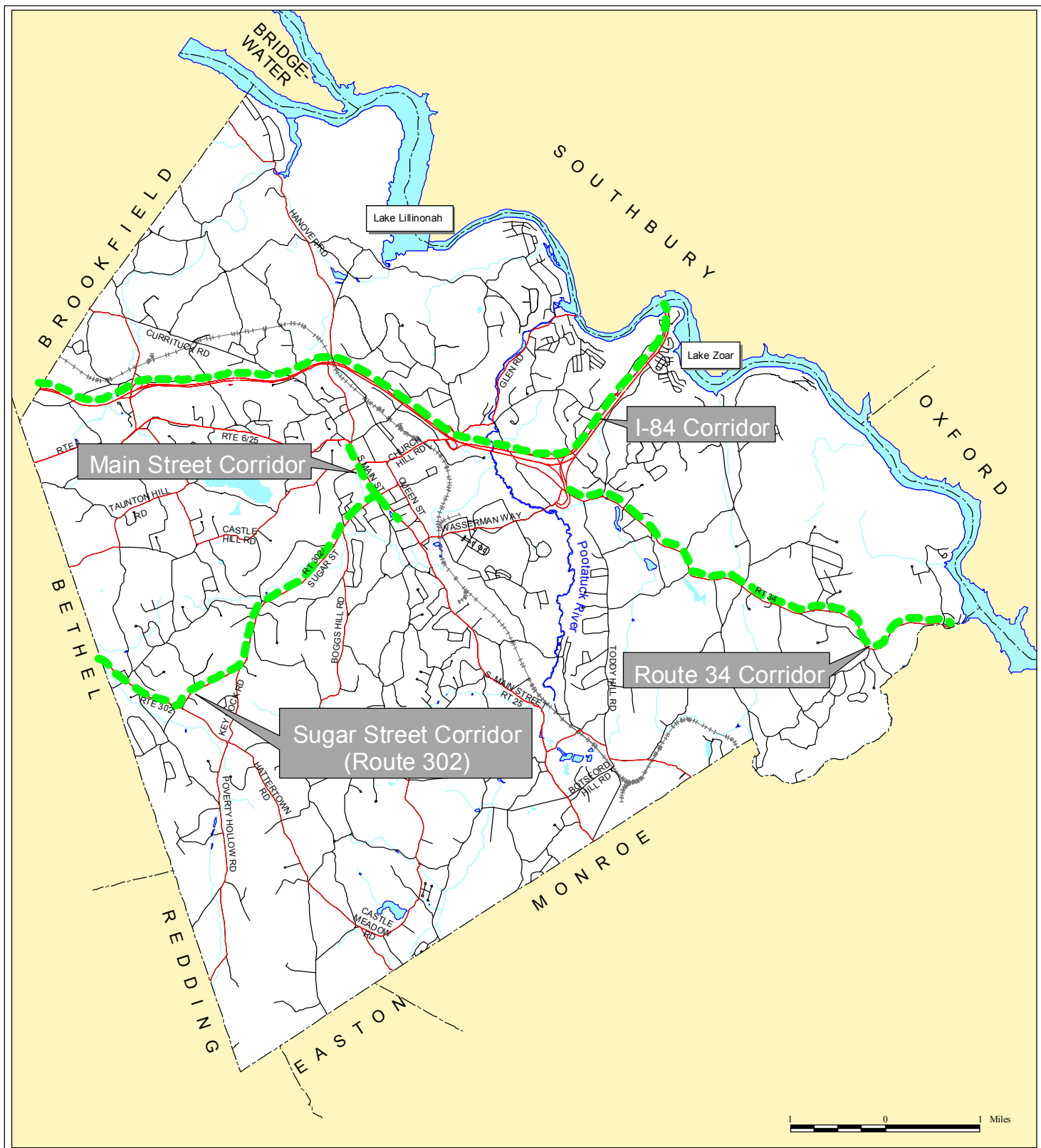
The perception of Newtown's community character is very significantly influenced by the visual qualities of the manmade elements of Newtown's landscape. These elements include:

- **The Borough of Newtown:** The Borough contains shopping areas, numerous local businesses, municipal facilities, churches and the Flag Pole. Portions of the Borough, especially Main Street, and the views of the Flag Pole from many different vantage points within town, form very powerful visual images which strongly influence the collective perception of Newtown's community character. These manmade features of Newtown's built environment combine to provide a key focal point of "community" within the Town. Newtown has long placed a high priority on maintaining the historic character of the Borough.
- **Newtown's Hamlets:** In addition to the Borough, Newtown has four historic hamlets, Sandy Hook, Hawleyville, Dodgingtown and Botsford. Each historical hamlet is characterized as a mixed-use center serving the surrounding neighborhoods and serve as community focal points within the context of the larger Town. Each hamlet has a distinct history and character and each contributes to the overall perception of Newtown.
- **Public Buildings and Community Character:** The elements of the built environment created through public investment play an important role in defining Newtown's community character. The environment created through public investment, which includes public buildings, parks, streets, and monuments are visible elements of the manmade environment which influence the perception of community image, as well as the perception of the collective value which Newtown residents place on their community.
- **Public Streets:** Newtown has 226 miles of local roads covering approximately 1,100 acres of Newtown's landscape. What happens on, within and along this public realm significantly affects the perception of Newtown's community character.
- **Public Parks:** Newtown has five Town parks totaling 131 acres. In addition to their physical presence, these facilities have an impact on the perception of the quality of services offered by the Town, which in turn contributes to the development of



community character.

- **Residential Neighborhoods:** The largest category of Newtown's built environment, in terms of land area affected, is the Town's housing stock. The predominate type of housing in Newtown is single family detached houses surrounded by landscaped yards. Newtown's newer residential



SOURCE OF BASE MAP:

Road Network -
Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, 2000

Legend

Image Corridor

Image Corridors

Plan of Conservation & Development

Newtown, Connecticut



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neighborhoods elicit a suburban quality to the visual environment, making it an increasingly significant element of the Town's community character. The overall character of Newtown's housing stock is one of very good quality, a very positive element of the Town's community character.

- **Newtown's Commercial Corridors:** Most of the commercial uses serving the needs of Newtown's residents are located along Route 25 and Route 6 and within the Borough. The common visual characteristic of many of Newtown's commercial uses, often located side by side, is a parking lot fronting the highway, which elicits a character of strip suburban development. Because commercial uses front on the most heavily traveled roadways in Newtown, their appearances contribute significantly to the daily perception of Newtown's community character, for residents and visitors alike.



- **Newtown's Business Centers:** The appearance of businesses visible from Newtown's heavily traveled roadways contributes to the daily perception of the Town's community character.

The quality of life experienced by those living and working in Newtown helps to form a perception of the Town's community character. In addition to considerations of the quality of the Town's natural and manmade environments, the quality of services provided by the public, private and institutional sectors contributes to an assessment of the quality of life afforded to town residents and those working within Newtown. The quality of services, including education, transportation, health, recreational, police, fire, emergency and retail can vary substantially from town to town and are the aspects of community often discussed by residents when describing the quality of life within their town.



- **Community Gathering Places and Focal Points:** Public gathering places and community focal points contribute positively to a Town's self image and function to provide a sense of community. Places of this nature in Newtown include churches, schools, playgrounds, parks, municipal buildings and public monuments. Community gathering places and focal points afford opportunities for residents to interact and provide important visual reference points.
- **Sense of Place:** The quality of Newtown's natural and built environments, the level of community activities and the availability and quality of services helps residents and visitors to formulate an impression of the Town's community character. These are the special and unique characteristics which set Newtown apart and make it a memorable place.

C. COMMUNITY CHARACTER: ISSUES, GOALS AND ACTION AGENDA

The formation of community character is a process characterized by incremental change.

Change is a constant in every community and the character of Newtown will continue to evolve as the community matures.



The elements of Newtown's community character held in high esteem by Town residents have been developed into community planning goals to be used as guidance for future activities that will affect the quality of life in Newtown. These planning goals are an important foundation of the updated POCD, addressing the key issues of growth, conservation and the management of change. The following section identifies the issues affecting the key elements of Newtown's community character, defines community planning goals and recommends an action agenda to achieving those goals.








ISSUE #1: NEWTOWN'S PASTORAL AND RURAL LANDSCAPE

1. The visual character of Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape, including open fields, stonewalls, ponds and streams, country lanes, forested areas, etc., makes a valued contribution to Newtown's Community Character.
2. Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape is altered one lot at a time, as undeveloped land is subdivided and built upon.
3. Some views of Newtown from State highways form lasting images of the Town's natural beauty and contribute to the Town's perceived community character.
4. The points of entry into Newtown from Brookfield, Bethel, Monroe and Southbury, I-84 interchanges 9, 10 and 11 provide initial impressions of Newtown's Community Character.
5. Reference Issue #4, Newtown's Farmland, in the Conservation of Natural Resources section of this 2003 POCD.

Goal Maintain the scenic characteristics of Newtown's "Pastoral and Rural Areas," and "Image Corridors" and enhance the "Gateways" to Newtown.

Action Agenda **Newtown's Pastoral and Rural Landscape**

Recommended Actions	Responsible Entity	PRIORITY				Required Resources	Status *
		On-Going	Short-Term (1-3 years)	Mid-Term (4-6 years)	Long-Term (7-10 years)		
Action: Define and map specific areas and roads critical to the preservation of Newtown's rural and pastoral landscapes.	PZC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Develop regulations and other means to protect these areas.	PZC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

Action: Pursue the use of design standards for the maintenance, upgrading and construction of town roads that contribute to the preservation of these critical roads.	BOS					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Designate additional “Scenic Roads” to help preserve the pastoral, rural and scenic characteristics of Newtown’s landscape.	PZC/BOS					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Utilize the State’s Scenic Road Program to help protect the scenic vistas of State highways within identified “Image Corridors.”	BOS					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Create and adopt design guidelines for business and industrial areas.	PZC/EDC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Encourage the elimination of overhead utility lines.	PZC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Establish and implement an “Adopt-A-Spot” plan for points of entry and other key locations within the Town.	EDC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Critique and update the Special Exceptions section of Newtown’s Planning and Zoning Regulations as an aid in maintaining the character of Newtown.	PZC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

Definitions: BB- Borough Burgess; BOE- Board of Education; BOFC- Board of Fire Commissioners; BOM- Board of Managers; BOS- Board of Selectmen; BZC- Borough Zoning Commission; CC- Conservation Commission; COA- Commission on Aging; EDC- Economic Development Commission; LC- Legislative Council; PBSC- Public Buildings & Site Commission; PC- Police Commission; PRC- Parks & Recreation Commission; PZC- Planning & Zoning Commission; YSB- Youth Services Board. ***Status:** Completed **X**, Underway- **U**, No Action- **N**.

ISSUE #2: APPEARANCE OF NEWTOWN’S CORRIDORS AND VILLAGE AREAS

1. The Borough is the historic center of Newtown and contributes significantly to the Town’s community character.
2. Each of Newtown’s four mixed-use hamlets (Botsford, Dodgingtown, Hawleyville and Sandy Hook) contributes in different ways to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.
3. Most commercial uses serving the needs of Newtown’s residents have been regulated to front on arterial highways, including Route 25 south of the Borough, Church Hill Road and along Route 6 west of Saw Mill Road.
4. Many commercial uses are located in freestanding buildings with shallow setbacks from

the highway and parking lots in front. Other commercial uses are located in small shopping centers with similar design characteristics.

5. The common visual characteristic of many commercial uses, often located side-by-side, is a parking lot fronting the highway, which elicits an impression of strip-suburban development.
6. Because these commercial uses front on the most heavily traveled roadways in Newtown, their appearance contributes significantly to the daily perception of Newtown's community character, for residents and visitors alike.
7. Currently, some portions of these corridors have an unsightly appearance while others are quite attractive.

Goal: Preserve the mixed-use functions and enhance the visual appearance of Newtown's Corridors and Villages.

Action Agenda

Newtown's Villages and Corridors

Recommended Actions	Responsible Entity	PRIORITY				Required Resources	Status *
		On-Going	Short-Term (1-3 years)	Mid-Term (4-6 years)	Long-Term (7-10 years)		
Action: Prepare design criteria for use by developers proposing new and expanded commercial, industrial, multi-family and mixed-use development projects.	PZC/EDC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Support Borough proposal to develop and implement Village District regulations that will govern the design of future development activities within the Borough and improve pedestrian mobility.	BB/BZC/PZC	✳				Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Develop design criteria for the Sandy Hook Design District and support streetscape enhancement proposals.	PZC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Develop design criteria for the Hawleyville Design District.	PZC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Determine the need in other Hamlets for streetscape specifications regarding sidewalks, curbing, street lighting, landscaping, and storm water management.	PZC			✳		Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Protect vacant lands surrounding the Borough and Newtown's four hamlets to preserve the historic settlement pattern of mixed-use villages and hamlets surrounded by open land.	PZC/CC	✳				Staff/Land Trusts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Formulate regulations for mixed-use development that incorporate landscaped public plazas and design features that create pedestrian-friendly environments.	PZC/EDC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Require attractive buffers between commercial and residential uses where mixed-use development is not possible and linkage is not warranted.	PZC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

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ISSUE #3: THE PUBLIC REALM

The quality of the public realm created by Town buildings, parks and monuments strongly influences the perception of Newtown's community character and the sense of community pride.

Goal: Enhance the public realm's contributions to Newtown's Community Character.

Action Agenda Newtown's Public Realm

Recommended Actions	Responsible Entity	PRIORITY				Required Resources	Status *
		On-Going	Short-Term (1-3 years)	Mid-Term (4-6 years)	Long-Term (7-10 years)		
Action: Develop a siting and design strategy for construction and upgrade of Town-owned buildings and facilities that will enhance the public's perception of Newtown's community character.	BS/PBSC	✳				Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Integrate new municipal facilities into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood.	PZC	✳				Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Consider co-location of municipal facilities, such as parks associated with schools or other public buildings, to create community activity centers and provide additional opportunities for community interaction.	BOE/PRC	✳				Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

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ISSUE #4: HISTORIC SITES AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

1. Newtown's Community Character is defined in part by the presence of historic structures and archaeological sites that provide links to the Town's past.
2. Some historical and archaeological resources in Newtown have been preserved for continued public enjoyment and education through local and municipal actions, including the establishment of historic districts in the Borough and Hattertown and the creation of the Orchard Hill Nature Center.

Goal: Preserve Newtown's historic sites and archeological resources.

Action Agenda Newtown's Historic Sites and Archaeological Resources

Recommended Actions	Responsible Entity	PRIORITY				Required Resources	Status *
		On-Going	Short-Term (1-3 years)	Mid-Term (4-6 years)	Long-Term (7-10 years)		
Action: Develop a Town-wide archeological resource inventory.	CC		✳			Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Incorporate archeological inventory information into Newtown's land-development regulatory process to protect valued historic sites and archaeological resources as protected	PZC/CC	✳				Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

open space.							
Action: Explore the use of “village district” regulations and “delay of demolition” ordinances to further protect Newtown’s historic resources.	PZC/BOS/LC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Implement building permit options that encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures in commercial districts	BOS/PZC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Promote the utilization of historic tax credits for income-producing properties.	EDC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action: Support initiatives that encourage historic preservation such as historic register/historic place designations.	PZC/CC					Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

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